

346
778 surmounted with drapery of many colours, stands in the middle of the floor of the storey above. The four prayer-wheels practically touch each other; there is about a yard of free ground between the wheels and the side walls, and a larger space between the doorway and the first wheel. The *lha-gong* is primarily the place of worship of the nuns—*in-é-bu*—and they are meant to be responsible for the services and good order of this place. The big wheels are turned by people sitting down, and there are wooden handles attached to the base which make this operation easier. Each time one of the big wheels completes a revolution a small bell is rung. The wheels are covered with paper of a vaguely Chinese design, representing fantastic flowers and goddesses.

[783] The first storey is approached by an external wooden staircase on the east side. It leads first of all into a corridor with an unused cooking place; at the back of that is a small and completely dark chamber called *tyang-gong* which is employed for mystic fasting and contemplation and also for the weekly ceremony of *kong-so klon* which is performed, at considerable risks, it is believed, to the officiant, to cleanse the monastery and neighbourhood of those devils which are infesting it.

[778] The main first-storey room is very similar to the one below, except that the books and images on the altar are different. This first-floor altar is flanked by a pair of thunder-birds—*sa-dher*—resembling Chinese dragons in silhouette cut out of cardboard. A couple of books are also kept permanently on the altar. To the right of the altar is a cupboard containing the sacred book *Rin-chet*; this book is treated with great reverence and the cupboard which holds it receives bowls of water and *chimi* as though it were an altar. But none of the lamas of Lingthem can read this book, nor do they know the proper ceremonials which should accompany the reading. On the four supporting columns hang wooden masks such as are worn when 'devil dances' are performed; but these actual masks, though representing named supernaturals, are not made for wearing, nor are dances performed in the monastery. Suspended from the cross-beams—for there is no ceiling and the reed thatch can be seen between the beams—are a number of sacred scroll pictures (*tang-ku*) but they have suffered so much from the weather that they are practically indecipherable.

[346] To the west of the main room, above the *lha-gong* is a lumber room containing paper-presses and other paraphernalia not in constant use. The Lepchas make paper out of the pounded underbark

781 negative results which occurred through not following their
 787 instructions. Not even Tafoor had any knowledge of his first
 horoscope, though he could have re-cast it if he had been curious.

vi

785 The higher lamas, the *omzet* and Dorjé Lapoon, perform mystic
 exercises for the good of their soul and to acquire supernatural
 powers. These exercises consist firstly in acquiring the requisite
 instruction and then being immured in a specially prepared and
 completely dark room called *tyang-gong* for a certain period. While
 they are immured they naturally see no light at all; for periods up
 to a fortnight they fast completely; for longer periods food is
 handed through a series of doors so arranged that no light and no
 possible contact with the external world reaches the mystic. During
 the whole period the lamas naturally cannot wash; a hole is
 especially prepared in the floor through which they can excrete.

As has already been explained this discipline is used for short
 periods for the ceremony of *kong-so klon*; it is also used for some
 other similar rituals. It was employed by Tafoor in order to obtain
 his supernatural power of stopping (or rather moving on) rain.
 Tafoor received his preliminary instruction from his 'big father',
 the second Dorjé Lapoon, who had been taught by a third lama
 who had learned the art in Tibet. When his instruction was com-
 plete a *tyang-gong* was constructed inside his house (there is a
 permanent one on the upper floor of the monastery) and Tafoor
 was immured. For ten days he did without food, drink or sleep,
 concentrating his mind on the special words and 'thoughts' that
 he had been taught, and counting his rosary. During the whole
 time the other people in the house had to take every precaution
 against his hearing human sounds or voices. At the end of the
 tenth day the second Dorjé Lapoon read the proper holy books,
 offered *cherkem* to the devils, opened the *tyang-gong* gradually,
 and fed Tafoor on boiled and powdered rice and milk. For two
 days Tafoor could not eat solid food; he was very weak and thin
 when he came out of the retreat.

789 Tafoor is now the only lama in the whole neighbourhood who
 practises the sending-away of rain; his uncle naturally knows how,
 but nowadays he concentrates exclusively on stopping hail. While
 Tafoor is keeping away the rain he must stop indoors concentrating;
 nobody must speak to him while he is doing this, nor may any

CHAPTER NINE

RELIGION III: THE PEOPLE OF MAYEL

i

I stated earlier that the Lepchas have two or perhaps three religions. [756]
 My reason for this statement is that the ritual connected with [771]
 harvesting and hunting, though performed by Mun, have a number [795]
 of features which do not occur elsewhere. It seems to me possible [241]
 that the worship of the people of Mayel, and perhaps of Pong rum [224]
 the god of hunters, is of a different origin to the other Mun cere-
 monies; unfortunately too little is known about the ritual of neigh-
 bouring tribes to enable profitable speculation to be made as to
 whether either or both ceremonies are relatively modern importa-
 tions from outside, or whether they are on the contrary the oldest
 Lepcha customs. The most outstanding differences with other Mun [562]
 ritual, and indeed with ordinary Lepcha life, is, first, a discrimination
 against women, secondly, an insistence on virginity for some of the
 celebrants, and thirdly a suggestion of the danger of menstruating
 women. Women may perform the sacrifice to the people of Mayel,
 but if they do so the ceremony is curtailed and fewer objects
 employed; they not only cannot sacrifice to Pong rum but must not
 even be aware when the sacrifice takes place; and the popped corn
 and *chi* which are employed in it, if not made by a man, which is
 preferable, must be made by a virgin girl. The chief offerings to [782]
 the people of Mayel are the *lafét* sacrifice and *sakyoufaat*; the
 small bird for the *lafét* must be killed by a virgin boy, and the
 strained *chi* poured into the buttered cup by a virgin girl.

This insistence upon virginity is unparalleled in Lepcha life; ¹ [241]
 785

¹ The only other instance is in the sacrifice to a pair of demons who cause a coughing disease (? tuberculosis) and whose presence and ritual were divined and by a Nandjému less than ten years ago. For this ceremony the popped corn must be made by a virgin girl, and the Mun must fast for twenty-four hours before the sacrifice. Only two people know how to perform this very modern importation.

241 indeed Lepchas have no word for 'virgin' and either have to say
 285 'clean' or else directly 'a person who has not copulated.' They
 claim that this insistence on virginity in connection with the
 objects of sacrifice for the people of Mayel is a custom derived
 from their father's fathers; if the special bird were not killed and
 if the killer and the *chi*-pours were not virgins the gods would
 be angry and the harvest spoiled. But, as so often in Lepcha life,
 theory and practice do not necessarily coincide; young children
 [78] are chosen to fill the rôles who it is hoped are virgin; if not—
ket ma-nin: it doesn't matter.

776 The people of Mayel consist of seven brothers each with their
 own name and each patron of some sort of grain. These seven
 brothers are the progenitors and ancestors and guardians of the
 Lepchas. They were created by Itpomu who placed rice and millet
 and maize in their charge when she made these crops. The people
 of Mayel live in seven huts; they are immortal; each morning they
 are infants, at midday they are grown men and in the evening they
 are old. They all have huge goitres and it is from them that people
 know that big goitres are a sign of prosperity and a large harvest.
 They wear the traditional Lepcha costume of clothes made of nettle
 cloth and small basket-work hats. They are somewhere between
 the gods and ordinary human beings; they are not gods because
 they live on earth but they are not human because they do not die.
 The land of Mayel is far up the Talung valley, somewhere behind
 Kinchenjunga; at one time in the past the road thither was open
 but now it has been closed and is as unpassable as the cutting edge
 of a knife. On the road to Mayel are three guardian spirits called
 Sok-po, who are brothers; the eldest is called Mayel Yook *rum*;
 he is also called Pong *rum* when hunters sacrifice to him; his
 younger brothers Mi-tik and Tom-tik are cruel deities who kill and
 eat men and animals; Tom-tik is like a bear. They are the special
 guardians of the ibex and musk deer which come from Mayel, which
 is the reason why these animals are so difficult to kill.

In the country of Mayel crops grow a hundred times as big as
 here and it is from that country that the seeds of our present crops
 originate. These crops are always ripe for harvesting. The
 migratory birds are called Mayel *fó*, birds of Mayel, and they are
 sent out by the people of Mayel to the Lepchas to indicate the seasons
 and the times when the various agricultural acts should be performed.
 When the time comes for the migratory birds to return to Mayel
 the parent birds die on the way and only the newly hatched ones

was married off to another man, but the Dorje-Lopön was¹⁵⁹ made to refund the original marriage price. He was,¹⁵⁸⁶ however, given the custody of his son Datoop, now a man of fifty, and one of the leading lights in the Lingtem monastery. As a child Datoop lived sometimes with his father and sometimes with his mother, who had now married the headman of a nearby village. It seemed as though the Dorje-¹⁵⁹ Lopön would now settle down to respectable married life;⁵⁹⁵ but in the course of his wanderings he one day discovered an attractive young girl in a neighbouring village. Chapshay was her name, and almost at once he deserted his wife and went to live at the home of his new friend's parents, only coming to Lingtem for the purpose of attending periodical ceremonies at the monastery. After a time Chapshay's parents tired of the situation and suggested that the Dorje-Lopön might at least regularise his position. To this he consented; and accordingly presented them with the necessary carcass of a pig. While he was still living with Chapshay he one day espied her niece, with whom he instantly fell in love. It was a mere matter of months for him to make Atyok pregnant; and¹⁵⁸⁶ when this occurred her parents forced him to do the ceremony known as *Tip-song*, in order that she should not give birth to a bastard. This was followed by marriage. For some time the three lived together at Chapshay's home, the¹⁵⁹ Dorje-Lopön still coming to Lingtem from time to time. In those days, before the present building had been erected, the main door of the monastery faced towards the east. There was but one big prayer-drum, and it was housed in a separate little building known as the *Hla-gong*. Living in Lingtem at the time was one Jiroong, whose wife, a woman much older than he, was also an Inebu. She had already been married before going to live with Jiroong, but her former husband and all his near relations were dead. She¹⁵⁸⁴ was not attractive; but since Jiroong's parents were too poor to obtain a better wife for him he was forced to submit. Jiroong's wife was in charge of the *Hla-gong*, which meant¹⁵⁹ that she was often about in the monastery; and in those days⁷⁸⁵

159 some of the Lamas were in the habit of spending occasional
 ● [783] days fasting in the building. Amongst these was the Dorje-
 Lopön; and so it was that the two became acquainted. After
 159 a time they got to know each other better, and it seems that
 837 they were in the habit of telling their beads together in the
Hla-gong. Ordinarily this conduct would have passed
 unnoticed; but in these particular circumstances it was most
 reprehensible in view of the fact that Jiroong had been the
 pupil of the Dorje-Lopön, who was thus his senior in rank.
 The Dorje-Lopön, however, had by now decided that life in
 Lingtem was too good a thing to be missed; and so it was that
 he decided not to return to his other two wives. Jiroong knew
 perfectly well what was going on; and while he did not care
 particularly for his wife, he could take no action, since to
 [793] complain of his senior's conduct would have been an offence
 against ecclesiastic discipline. Things went on in this rather
 unsatisfactory manner for several months, when the Dorje-
 Lopön thought his position sufficiently stabilised for him to
 visit Jiroong's wife in her own home; but this was rather more
 than the village would stand. Attempts were now made to
 induce the Dorje-Lopön to return to his two former wives;
 but without success. All this happened about seventeen years
 ago, when the Dorje-Lopön must have been about sixty-five
 years old. A meeting was now called of all the local Lamas,
 headmen, and Youmis. They considered the case and
 decided that the Dorje-Lopön must go back to his former
 wives. This he flatly refused to do, and went so far as to say
 that they could kill him before he would consent to leave
 Lingtem. A compromise was therefore arrived at by which it
 was decided that the Dorje-Lopön should allow his two former
 wives to come and live with him in Lingtem, which they
 did. By this time his son by his first wife was already married
 and had four children of his own. Chapshay and Atyok,
 wives two and three, now came over to Lingtem and took up
 residence with Datoop, with whom the Dorje-Lopön, his
 father, was then living, having promised to see no more of
 Jiroong's wife. It looked as though the affair had been